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Article Summary: The letter from Smith takes issue with the article, "A Western Democrat's Quarrel With the Language Laws," published in the summer 1969 issue of *Nebraska History*:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1969LanguageLaws.pdf>



*It is not the policy of the society to print personal correspondence; however we feel this letter regarding the article "A Western Democrat's Quarrel With the Language Laws" that appeared in the summer issue of Nebraska History is worthy of note.*

July 7, 1969

Father Thomas O'Brien Hanley,  
Professor of History  
Marquette University,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dear Father Hanley:

I have read your article regarding the late Arthur F. Mullen, appearing in the publication of the Nebraska State Historical Society. In the main I enjoyed it, as I had a personal acquaintance with him.

However, I am distressed by your statement that,  
"Bryan had sold out to Wilson and betrayed  
the Western Democrat, Champ Clark."

Obviously, you refer to the Democratic National Convention of 1912, held in Baltimore. I am sure you are mistaken in your conclusions, and my reasons for so saying, follow.

Remember, the year 1912 was a year when progressives and reactionaries in both major political parties sought control. Bryan was a leader of the progressives in the Democratic Party.

Arriving at the Convention as a delegate from Nebraska, he found the reactionaries entrenched. Thomas F. Murphy of Tammany, with New York's 90 votes to use as he chose, was there. J. Pierpont Morgan, August Belmont, and Thomas F. Ryan, three men then under investigation as alleged perpetrators of the "money trust," were there. Reactionary Alton B. Parker was groomed for Temporary Chairman. Bryan was compelled to become the opposing candidate. Parker won on a close vote.

However, this vote was most revealing on the reactionary-progressive issue. The Wilson delegates, practically to a man, voted for Bryan, while most Clark delegates supported Parker. This line up was observable in other preliminary contests involving that issue.

Nevertheless, when the time came for balloting on candidates, Bryan, following instructions from Nebraska Democrats, voted for Clark for several ballots. During this time Murphy was casting New York's 90 votes for Harmon of Ohio.

Suddenly, Murphy changed to Clark. It was then that Bryan changed to Wilson, saying to the convention:

"The delegates for whom I speak stand ready to carry out the instructions given, in the spirit in which they were given and upon the conditions under which they were given; but these delegates will not participate in the nomination of any man whose nomination depends upon the vote of the New York delegation. Speaking for myself and those who join me, we, therefore, withhold our vote from Mr. Clark as long as New York's vote is recorded for him, and I hereby notify the chairman and this convention that I desire recognition to withdraw these votes from any candidates to whom New York's votes are thrown. The position that we take in regard to Mr. Clark we will take in regard to any other candidate whose name is now, or may come before the convention. We shall not be parties to the nomination of any man, no

matter who he may be or from what section of the country he comes, who will not, when elected, be absolutely free to carry out the anti-Morgan-Ryan-Belmont resolution and make his administration reflect the wishes and hopes of those who believe in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Now, I am prepared to announce my vote, with the understanding that I stand ready to withdraw my vote from the candidate for whom I now cast it if Mr. Murphy casts the ninety votes of New York for him. I cast my vote for Nebraska's second choice—Governor Wilson." (Bryan's Heart to Heart Appeals, p. 70)

The preeminence of this progressive movement is emphasized by an article in *Life*, May 16, 1960, describing this Convention in some detail. Although the author shows clearly his hostility to Bryan, he says of the latter's change to Wilson:

"The effect of Bryan's move was spectacular. Once again the wires began pouring in, backing his stand, demanding that the delegates cleanse themselves of Wall Street" (p. 136)

Referring to Wilson and the convention, this article from *Life* reads further:

"Maybe this was the genuine liberal the people wanted. And they certainly seemed to want one, judging by the wires coming in. Messages from farmers, mill hands, clerks, ordinary citizens everywhere. All over the country, they were down at the local telegraph offices, checking the latest convention bulletins, firing off wires to their delegates. As these telegrams poured into Baltimore, they all seemed to say one thing: Give the nation a progressive candidate running on a progressive platform."

Of this progressive sentiment, Bryan said :

“The Baltimore convention was coerced by the Democratic sentiment at home. According to the best information obtainable, about one hundred and ten thousand telegrams were received by the delegates, or an average of nearly one hundred each. I received eleven hundred and eighty-four, signed by more than thirty-three hundred persons. My part was turning the faucet, so to speak, so that public opinion could flow in upon the convention.” (p. 73, Heart to Heart Appeals)

During the convention, the progressive Republican Senator from Wisconsin, Robert M. La Follette, wrote in his paper that but for the fight Bryan was making, the reactionaries would take complete control.

Later, I served as Secretary to Judge William H. Thompson of Grand Island. I also enjoyed an acquaintance with Dr. Phil Hall of Lincoln. The former attended the 1912 convention as a delegate; the latter as National Committeeman. Both worked in close association with Bryan. I heard them discuss that convention many times, but never was there the slightest intimation of any “deal” between Bryan and Wilson. Rather, the discussion centered around Clark’s attempt to “carry water on both shoulders,” while Wilson stood steadfast with the progressives.

No man figures more prominently or favorably in the history of Nebraska, than William Jennings Bryan. Let us respect his memory in the light of facts.

Respectfully submitted,  
SEYMOUR L. SMITH  
Omaha, Nebr.